Other (Dominus Otho) (c. 1006–c. 1086)

Origin and Family

Born after 1006. Died before 1086.

Spouse: Unknown
Children: Walter fitz Other (c. 1037–c. 1116)

Other's son, Walter fitz Other, is listed in the Domesday Book of 1086 as "Walter filius Other."[8] From this singular entry, a few important conclusions are possible:

First, **"Other"** was his name in England. As J. H. Round observed, "I cannot explain how 'Otho' replaced the well-authenticated 'Other', probably to give it a more Italian appearance."[7]

Second, Other was not a lord or landholder in 1086, as he does not appear in the Domesday Book among tenants-in-chief or sub-tenants.

From this evidence, the name *Dominus Otho* must be regarded either as fictional or as the name Other used prior to his arrival in England, for which no contemporary documentation survives.

Other stands at the head of numerous prominent family pedigrees, yet remarkably few verifiable facts about him exist. Medieval heralds and later genealogists had strong incentives to elevate the pedigree of his son Walter, whose career under King William brought the family into prominence.

Legends of the Origin of Dominus Other

The legends surrounding Other are numerous, but they generally fall into three categories:

1. He served at the court of Edward the Confessor.
2. He belonged to the Florentine Gherardini family.
3. He was a Norman lord with close ties to William the Conqueror.

Any or all of these traditions may represent later inventions. Nevertheless, because of Other's central position in so many influential pedigrees, each warrants brief examination.

The names "Otho" or "Other" were fairly common at the time in England, Normandy, and Italy. Variations are English: Otho, Other; Italy: Othere, Ottherus; Normandy: l'autre, autier. It has been tied to an old Viking/Norse term for "second of two". In all three stories below, the name "Dominus Otho" is used by the sources.

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The English Origin Legend

Dominus Otho is sometimes described as an important member of the court of King Edward the Confessor. According to this tradition, Otho was with Edward in Normandy during the king's exile and returned with him to England in 1042, when Edward ascended the throne following the death of his half-brother Harthacnut. Edward surrounded himself with Norman advisers, and Otho is listed among them. Other sources, however, place Otho's arrival in England no earlier than about 1057.[1]

The coronation of Edward the Confessor. Otho would have attended if he was part of Edward's court, as claimed.

Upon Edward's death in 1066, the Norman King William (William the Conqueror) invaded England to seize the throne. William promised land and spoils of war to a small group of compatriot lords and soldiers. William invaded England with an army of 4,000 and defeated the Saxons in the famous Battle of Hastings. He became William I, King of England, and divided the land accordingly:[5]

> About 25% of the available land was acquired for his own purpose and another 25% went to the church. This was a necessary obligation as the invasion was with the blessing of Rome. The rest was divided between his trusted and loyal servants. These amounted to only 10 or 12 people. These huge land grants were subject to conditions. A landowner would entail military duty. The tenants-in-chief would be responsible for raising an army in times of crisis. The tenants-in-chiefs, in turn, subdivided further to vassals, who were responsible for providing a fighting Knight, along with everything else he would need in battle.

Details from the Bayeux Tapestry showing how William's shipbuilder's prepared his transport vessels for the invasion

The term "Tenants-in-Chief" was not used in the Domesday Book (1086) to describe land holders. Instead*, Dominus* or *Tenens in capite* were used.[8] Dominus Otho only appears in this book as the father of Walter ("Walter filius Other"). However, the book lists Walter as the tenant in chief of many properties, and these were granted to him directly by William.[8]

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William I by George Vertue (1648-1756)

One later source claims that Otho was made an “honorary baron” under King Edward[13], and another asserts that he held the manor of Burnham, Buckinghamshire “in Saxon times,” before 1066. Both statements are almost certainly later embellishments. In this period, the title *Dominus* denoted respect or status—rather than a formal rank. If Otho was associated with Edward’s court as claimed, the title would reflect his standing as a trusted *court adviser*, not as a hereditary noble.

The Italian Origin Legend

One oft-repeated origin story for Otho is that he was from Florence. From the Gerrard Family history,[6] and repeated in the White, Keating, Desmond, and several other family histories is this genealogy:

> **Dominus Otho,** Duke of Tuscany who was born about 1006 in Italy. He married Mrs. Other of Tuscany. She was born about 1013. Otho, whose name is sometimes spelled, Othere or Other, was a member of the Florentine family, the Gherardini. The “Otho” comes from his father’s given name of Ottorus which is sometimes spelled as Othoer.
>
> While he was Duke of Tuscany between 1006 and 1100, it would be 500 years before the famous de Medici family would be Grand Dukes of Tuscany. He came to the court of King Edward the Confessor in about 1056, ten years before the Norman Conquest of England. He passed into Normandy, and in 1057 crossed into England where he became a favorite with Edward the Confessor, and obtained extensive estates from the monarch.

From The Yale Genealogy and History of Wales[1], and often repeated[2,3,4] we have:

> He is supposed to have been a member of the family of Gherardini of Florence, Italy; and this is seemingly confirmed by the Latin form of the name “Geraldini” assumed by the descendants; in any event he was a nobleman and came from Florence. This noble passed over into Normandy and thence to England, in 1057, where he became so great a favorite of King Edward the Confessor, that he excited the jealousy of the Saxon thanes.
>
> His English possessions were enormous and at his death they devolved upon his son, [Walter fitz Other].

The enormous English possessions mentioned above is not an over-statement. However, they were granted to Otho’s son Walter fitz Other directly – there is no record that Otho ever held these lands.

The issue of “exciting the jealousy of the Saxon thanes” is a documented historical event that occurred in 1052. In that year, the Saxon Godwin, Earl of Wessex, led a threatened revolt that resulted in the ejection of most of the Norman advisors to Edward. Presumably, they returned to Normandy.

The Gheraldini web site suggests that Otho “may have made the Norman connection during William's campaigns in Italy and Sicily, during the first half of the eleventh century. It seems probable that he was well known to William of Normandy, who heaped honours on his son Walter. His descendants include the Windsor family (Earls of Plymouth) whose eldest son is traditionally named “Other”.[12]

This origin story is a legend based on tradition only, and for many reasons it is not credible:

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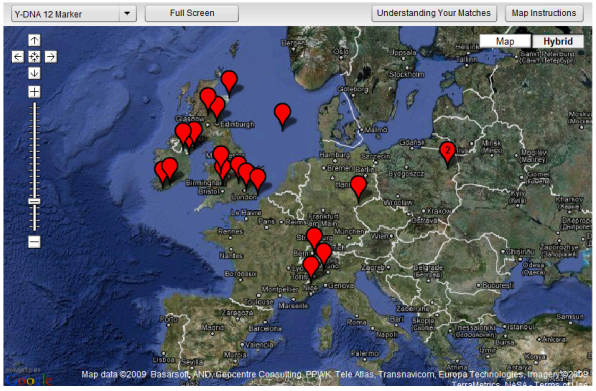
- Otho's alleged title of "Duke of Tuscany" in the 10th–11th centuries did not exist, and no contemporary Florentine document mentions Otho or any such migration to England.
- Gerald of Wales (Geraldus Cambrensis, 1146–1223), a famous historian and proud descendant of Otho, refers to his own lineage only as the Giraldidae—never "Gherardini"—and makes no mention whatsoever of an Italian origin. Had such a pedigree existed, he would certainly have said so.

- The legend originates not in the 11th century but in the 15th. In 1413, an Irish priest named Maurice Fitzgerald, visiting Florence, proclaimed kinship with the Gherardini. The Florentines, unfamiliar with the claim, treated it cautiously; a Florentine state secretary in 1440 referred to the supposed connection with the qualifier *si vera assertio*—"if the assertion is true." No Italian record prior to this time suggests such a link

- There is no independent evidence in primary English or Norman sources such as the Domesday Book, the Battle Abbey Rolls, the Pipe Rolls, or the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles linking Otho to Italy. Burke's Peerage likewise makes no Italian connection, instead describing Otho as a favored court adviser to Edward the Confessor—a role for which there is substantial evidence of Norman involvement but none for Italian courtiers.

- Walter fitz Other is listed in the Battle Abbey Rolls as Gautier fitz Autier, a clearly Norman/French rendering—again with no Italian implications.

- DNA evidence is conclusive. If the FitzGeralds and the Gherardini shared a male-line ancestor in the 11th century, their Y-DNA signatures would show a clear connection. They do not. The lineages do not indicate kinship. Modern DNA evidence makes the Florence story biologically impossible. For example, the map below is from a descendant of Maurice FitzGerald. Notice how there is no connection to Italy.



A Norman/French Origin Legend

Dominus Otho's son Walter was with William in Normandy prior to the invasion of 1066, so it seems likely that Otho had some presence in Normandy as well.

One source asserts that Otho was a *Count* or *Seigneur* in Normandy[9]—often as "of Montagne" or sometimes "Mortain." The comital lordship of Mortain belonged to Robert, William the Conqueror's half-brother, while the lordship of Mortagne was held by the well-documented Châteaudun–Mortagne line

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(Rotrou I and his son Geoffroi). No contemporary Norman source connects Otho with any such title, and there is no evidence that he held land or rank in Normandy comparable to a count or seigneur.

The confusion may stem from a coincidental overlap: Geoffroi de Mortagne and Walter FitzOther both fought in the Battle of Hastings, both received unusually large rewards from King William, and both married women named Beatrice (Geoffroi married Beatrice of Rouen). These similarities may have led some later writers to conflate the two families, but the historical record keeps them entirely distinct.

For Other and his son Walter to enjoy the privileges in their association with King William, they had to have been known members of the Norman community, but there is no evidence that they were lords in Normandy prior to the invasion. For this legend, Walter fitz Other was a Norman companion of William the Conqueror, and it is therefore most plausible that his father Other was a Norman of respectable but unknown rank.

Conclusion

Of the three competing origin legends—English, Italian, and Norman—the Italian account is demonstrably fictional. The English tradition relies on later assertions without contemporary support. The Norman explanation, by contrast, aligns with what can be documented and, although unproven, is the most credible.

End of Life

A later tradition claims that Other held the manor of Burnham, Buckinghamshire, “in Saxon times,” but this lacks contemporary evidence. Walter fitz Other is, however, listed in the Domesday Book (1086) as the tenant of Burnham. Thus, if Other held land there, he must have died before 1086.

Research Notes

Comments:
An uncommon inherited hand ailment, Dupuytren's Contracture is strongly associated with people of Northern European descent. Raymond D. Yale, a descendant (and brother of the author), contracted this ailment, increasing the likelihood that the Yale Family have Viking or Norman heritage.

Online Genealogy References:
WikiTree ID: n/a
FamilySearch ID: L6RN-2TH

Further Reading:

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12. Hunneyball, Paul. "The Other House of Windsor" History of Parliament, 2019

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